
	<h1>Lightning: A Potentially Deadly Strike With Each Flash</h1> <p>National Lightning Safety Awareness Week June 19-25, 2005</p>	
---	--	---

Every year lightning kills approximately 70 people and injures another 300. In the last 10 years in Montana there have been 6 deaths and 14 injuries due to lightning. In the United States, there are an estimated 25 million cloud-to-ground lightning flashes each year, and a recent storm system over the Ark-La-Tex region produced 17,000 strikes within one hour! Lightning can be fascinating to watch, but it is also extremely dangerous. Because lightning usually claims only one or two victims at a time it generally receives much less attention than the more destructive weather-related killers.

There are two very easy things to remember when it comes to lightning safety:

1. If you see a storm coming your way, stop what you are doing and go inside, or into a vehicle if a building is not available.
2. When you hear thunder within 30 seconds of a lightning strike, you are close enough to be hit. The thunderstorm is within 6 miles of you. Once inside, wait until 30 minutes after the last clap of thunder before going outside again. This is known as the 30-30 Rule.

**Outdoor Safety:** Most lightning deaths and injuries in the United States occur during the summer months when the combination of lightning and outdoor summertime activities reaches a peak. During the summer, people take advantage of the warm weather to enjoy a multitude of outdoor recreational activities. Unfortunately, those outdoor recreational activities can put them at greater risk of being struck by lightning. People involved in activities such as farming, boating, swimming, fishing, bicycling, golfing, jogging, walking, hiking, camping, or working out of doors all need to take the appropriate actions in a timely manner when thunderstorms approach. Where organized sports activities take place, coaches, umpires, referees, or camp counselors must protect the safety of the participants by stopping the activities sooner, so that the participants and spectators can get to a safe place before the lightning threat becomes significant. To reduce the threat of death or injury, those in charge of organized outdoor activities should develop and follow a plan to keep participants and spectators safe from lightning.



Photos by Gene Rhoden

**Indoor Safety:** There are three main ways lightning enters homes and buildings: (1) a direct strike, (2) through wires or pipes that extend outside the structure, and (3) through the ground. Regardless of the method of entrance, once in a structure, the lightning can travel through the electrical, phone, plumbing, and radio/television reception systems. Lightning can also travel through any metal wires or bars in concrete walls or flooring.

Phone use is the leading cause of indoor lightning injuries in the United States. Lightning can travel long distances in both phone and electrical wires, particularly in rural areas. Stay away from windows and doors as these can provide the path for a direct strike to enter a home. Do not lie on the concrete floor of a garage as it likely contains a wire mesh. In general, basements are a safe place to go during thunderstorms. However, there are some things to keep in mind. Avoid contact with concrete walls which may contain metal reinforcing bars. Avoid washers and dryers since they not only have contacts with the plumbing and electrical systems, but also contain an electrical path to the outside through the dryer vent.

Lightning also causes significant damage to personal property each year. In addition to direct strikes, lightning generates electrical surges that can damage electronic equipment some distance from the actual strike. Typical surge protectors will NOT protect equipment from a lightning strike. To the extent possible, unplug any appliances or electronic equipment from all conductors well before a thunderstorm threatens. This includes not only the electrical system, but also the reception system. If you plan to be away from your home when thunderstorms are possible, be sure to unplug unneeded equipment before you leave.



A tennis shoe from a person who was struck by lightning.



Boaters in danger of being struck near Duck Creek  
(From Good Evening Glasgow)

ODDS OF BECOMING A LIGHTNING VICTIM	
U.S. 2000 Census population	280,000,000
Odds of being struck by lightning in a given year (reported deaths + injuries)	1/700,000
Odds of being struck by lightning in a given year (estimated total deaths + injuries)	1/240,000
Odds of being struck in your lifetime (Est. 80 years)	1/3000
Odds you will be affected by someone being struck (Ten people affected for every one struck)	1/300

**Remember that Lightning Kills...Play It Safe**



[www.weather.gov/glasgow](http://www.weather.gov/glasgow)  
[www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov](http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov)